Aladdin

Angelwings

№. 10

Can Danielle handle her new responsibility?

Running Away

Donna Jo Napoli

BC

"I'm your little angel"

"I have a task for you. Something pretty easy, I think."

The Little Angel of Responsibility had been waiting for this. She had all her feathers except for the ones that should go at the very top of each wing. When she earned those, she'd earn her wings. A wonderful bell would ring, and she'd be able to fly with the archangels. "I'm your little angel," said the little angel. She ran in a circle around the archangel, her arms outspread as though she were flying. "I'm ready."

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Donna Jo Napoli

illustrations by Lauren Klementz-Harte

Aladdin Paperbacks

New York London Toronto Sydney Singapore

Thank you to all my family,
Brenda Bowen, Cylin Busby, Nöelle Paffett-Lugassy,
Karen Riskin, and Richard Tchen

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

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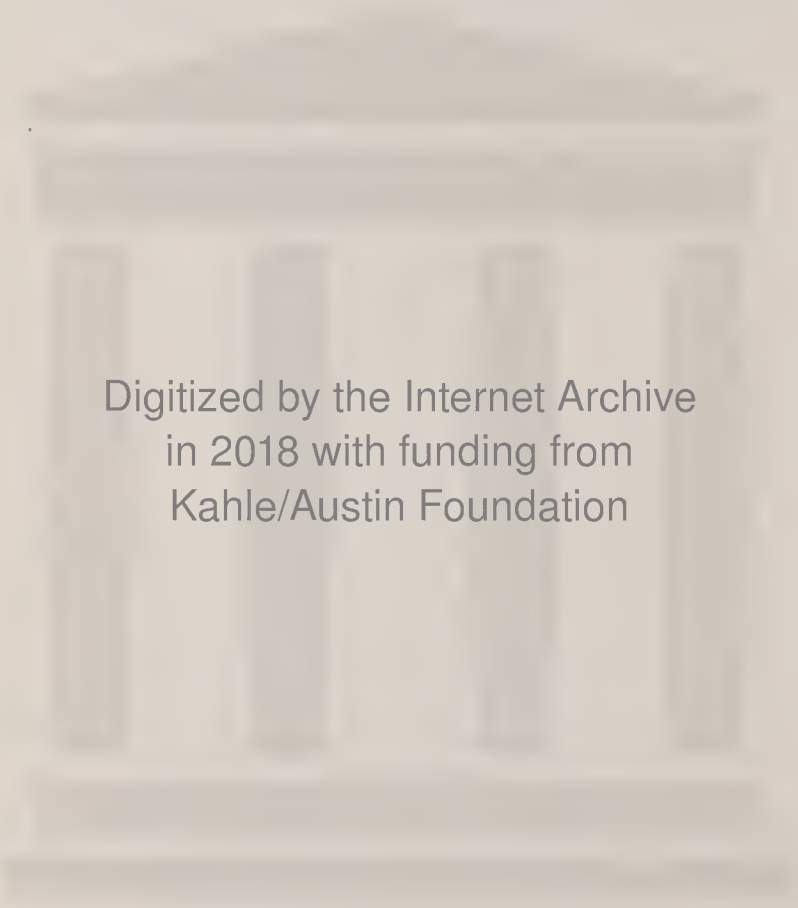
For Robert,
who does it on his own



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Angel Talk

The Little Angel of Responsibility looked carefully through her gigantic basket of yarns. She picked up a ball—too lavender. Another—too royal purple. Oh, yes, there was the violet ball, finally. She twisted together the end of the violet yarn with the end of the indigo yarn that was already on her knitting needles.

"What are you making?" The Archangel of Responsibility leaned over to take a look. He had to lean far, because he was very tall.

"It's a winter scarf." The little angel spread out the long scarf. It was already three feet long.

"Hmmm. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, navy . . . "

"No, that's indigo, not navy. And the last color, the one I just added, is violet."

"The rainbow." The archangel smiled. "Who's it for?"

"The Little Angel of Imagination."

"What's the occasion?"

"Nothing special," said the Little Angel of Responsibility. Then she blushed. "Well, actually, it was supposed to be the prize for winning the chess match."

"The chess match? That was months ago."

"I know. I try to work on it very hard. But you know how it is."

The Archangel of Responsibility shook his head. "No, I don't. How is it?"

"Well, things come up." The little angel smiled guiltily. "But the Little Angel of Imagination understands."

"That's because he has a good imagination," said the archangel.

"Did you come here for a reason?" asked the little angel.

The archangel laughed agreeably. "I have a task for you. Something pretty easy, I think."

The little angel had been waiting for this. She had all her feathers except for the ones that should go at the very top of each wing. When she earned those, she'd earn her wings. A wonderful bell would ring, and she'd be able to fly with the archangels. "I'm your little angel," said the little angel. She ran in a circle around the archangel, her arms outspread as though she were flying. "I'm ready."

"What about the scarf?"

The little angel stopped and giggled. "See what I mean?"

Math Homework

Mrs. Cronin wrote the math assignment on the blackboard. "It's not easy, kids."

Everyone groaned.

"So you can take the last half hour of the day to get a head start on it." She smiled. "Start working."

Danielle opened her math book to page 143. She read the first problem. What was a denominator? The word didn't even sound familiar, but Mrs. Cronin must have taught it to them or she wouldn't have assigned this. Danielle stared at the problem for a long time. Then she glanced around the room.

Judy was sucking on the eraser end of her pencil. She did that a lot. With a sudden jerk she sat upright and wrote madly on her paper.

Kirby turned the page. How'd he get that far so fast?

Hannah wrote with her right hand while her left hand opened and closed the barrette in her hair.

They knew what they were doing. Danielle didn't. The book index—oh, yeah, that would help her. She flipped to the index and looked up "denominator." Page 141. A denominator was the bottom number in a fraction. All right. These problems weren't so bad, after all. Danielle copied the first one onto her paper and worked it out. Then she happened to look up.

Mrs. Cronin was looking right at her.

Danielle looked back at the book.

Mrs. Cronin walked down the aisle and stood beside Danielle's desk. "Danielle?" She talked very softly.

Danielle gave her a small smile.

"Do your homework tonight, Danielle."

Danielle nodded and turned back to the

book. She furrowed her brows and gripped her pencil firmly, so Mrs. Cronin would know she meant business. Tonight she would do her homework, and she wouldn't let anything come in the way.

Mrs. Cronin bent over and whispered in her ear. "I mean it. If you don't do it, I'll have to send home a note to your parents tomorrow. You started out the year fine. I know you can do well again if you just put your mind to it."

The school bell rang.

Danielle shoved her math book and notebook into her backpack and sprinted out the room, to the sidewalk, and down the block. Her sister, Clarissa, rode by on the bus and waved to her. Danielle didn't take the bus because running was good training for track. Danielle planned to be the best runner on the team this year.

She came in the back door of her house, and Rosie jumped on her. "Good dog."

Danielle laughed and threw her arms around Rosie's back, then pressed her lips together so that they were completely hidden as the dog gave her face a tongue bath.

Danielle listened hard. She didn't really expect to hear her mother call out to her like she used to. These days Ma was always totally engrossed in her latest project when Danielle came home.

Danielle dropped her backpack on a kitchen chair. Then she walked through the downstairs with Rosie right behind her. "Ma?"

"Danielle, Danielle, we're here." Roger held on to the vertical rails around the stair landing on the second floor and pressed his face between them. He smiled at Danielle.

Danielle loped up the stairs, two at a time. That was good track training, too.

Ma handed Danielle a big cloth tote. "We're going to the grocery store." She didn't believe in disposable things, so whenever

they went shopping, Danielle and Ma and Pa brought along big totes and Clarissa and Roger brought along little ones.

"We're buying everything we can find that's purple," said Clarissa. "We might stop at the florist, too."

Danielle looked at Ma. "Purple?"

"That's the color of the birthstone for February—amethyst," said Ma. "My February show should open with the right color. I always do black-and-white photos—but the first photos you see as you enter the showroom should be special."

It was only October, but Ma had been planning for this show for the past few weeks. It was all she thought about. Ma was a photographer and up till now she'd been content to take great pictures of the family. The entrance hall of their home was lined floor to ceiling with Ma's photos. But last month one of Ma's photos was printed in the city paper. Oh, Ma had had photos in their little town

paper pretty often. But the city paper was different. That changed everything.

It was just a normal shot of a little girl coming out of the Philadelphia Jazz Festival with her family. But the girl had a barbecued rib clutched in one hand. Ma had told Pa and Danielle and Clarissa and Roger to wait a minute and she had watched while the little girl passed a homeless man who was sitting on the sidewalk begging. The girl walked past him, looking back over her shoulder. Then she turned around and gave the man her barbecued rib. Ma took a picture of the very moment when the girl handed it to him. The girl's mouth was an open O, and the man's mouth was a huge smile.

Anyway, once that photo came out in the paper, Ma got a ton of phone calls. Everyone wanted her to take photos of everything. Weddings, bar mitzvahs, anniversaries. And a gallery in the city was going to have a show of her work in February.

Ma had become a celebrity.

All of them marched down the stairs now. As they passed through the kitchen, Ma glanced at Danielle's backpack. "Do you have homework?"

Danielle looked at the empty totes hanging from their shoulders. Ma wanted to fill them now. She needed to. And when they got home, she'd need to arrange all the purple things in at least a dozen different ways. And she'd want Danielle's help the whole time. Danielle knew how important all of this was to her.

Danielle zipped up one of the small outside pockets on the pack. "Mrs. Cronin gave us time to do it in school." That wasn't a lie, after all.

"Oh, how nice."

Angel Talk

"I don't like that mother," said the little angel.

"What? Why not?"

"She made Danielle go shopping with her instead of letting Danielle do her homework."

"Now wait just a minute." The Archangel of Responsibility scratched the very top of his head. When he did that, he looked taller than ever. "You saw the same thing I saw. The mother wanted everyone to help her shop, sure, but she didn't force Danielle."

"But they could have gone shopping later, after Danielle finished her homework. Now Danielle's going to get in trouble with her teacher."

"You're right about the teacher part," said the archangel.

"I'm right about the mother, too," said the Little Angel of Responsibility firmly. "She's the irresponsible one."

"Come on. The mother asked Danielle if she had homework."

The Little Angel of Responsibility looked away in confusion. She'd been wondering herself about why Danielle hadn't told her mother she had homework to do. Still, the mother's behavior was what bothered her most. "What's so important about buying all those things, anyway? Bunches of grapes and plums. Is Danielle's mother crazy or something?"

"Sort of. That show she talked about worries her. She's going to put her photographs on exhibit, and she thinks of it as her big break—her chance to become a professional photographer."

"Oh." The little angel hesitated. "Oh, I get it now," she said with sympathy. "Does Danielle know that her mother's worried?"

"Yes."

So that's why Danielle didn't tell her

mother she had homework. "Well, then," said the little angel, "Danielle was right to go shopping with her mother." She nodded her head emphatically. "And there's really no job for me here. Danielle is being very responsible. Her mother needs her."

"She needs her, all right, little angel. But what she needs most right now is for Danielle to do all the things she's supposed to do. Danielle's mother is counting on her to have her schoolwork done."

"Now we're back to where we started. The mother shouldn't make Danielle go shopping when it's time to do homework."

"But she thinks Danielle already did her homework," said the archangel. "Danielle made her think that."

"Danielle didn't actually lie," said the Little Angel of Responsibility slowly.

"Does it matter? Danielle knows what her mother thinks. She does have a problem, little angel, and you do have a job here."

"I like the color of those irises they bought," said the little angel.

"Are you trying to change the subject?"

"No, I just thought of how much help Danielle's mother needs and I remembered those beautiful irises and, well, I got an idea." The little angel pulled a pair of knitting needles out of her gown.

The Archangel of Responsibility tapped the tip of the knitting needles. "What are you doing with those?"

"I carry them everywhere. Just in case. Wait for me."

"Why? Where are you going?"

"You saw all that royal purple yarn I have. I'll make a beautiful purple pot holder that will look great in the middle of the mother's photograph."

"Hold up!"

"I'll be right back," called the little angel.

Signatures

Judy tapped Danielle on the shoulder and laughed. "Did your little brother write that?" She opened a long, thin box, took out a pencil, and went to the sharpener at the back of the room.

Danielle looked at her math homework. The first problem was perfect. The second and third were messy. She had done them on the bus this morning. She should have run to school, for track training and all, but she figured bus time might be good homework time. The trouble was, the bus was bouncy. Judy was right: Her homework did look like a five-year-old had written it. And she hadn't finished, anyway. There were still three more problems left.

Mrs. Cronin cleared her throat. "Does anyone else have homework to hand in?"

How could Danielle turn in a half-finished piece of junk? She liked to do good work. Or, at least, she used to like to. Danielle crumpled her homework and jammed it into her desk. A small, sick feeling filled her mouth.

The rest of the day went better. They had recorders in music lesson, and Danielle loved the recorder. They had volcanoes in science lesson, and Danielle loved volcanoes. They had pizza at lunch, and Danielle loved pizza.

And they had a spelling quiz. Spelling homework was two nights ago. Everyone was supposed to look up the words in a dictionary and write them in sentences. Danielle hadn't done it because Ma was using the dictionary. She was writing a little "blurb"—as she called it—to go under one of her photographs for the show, and when she wrote blurbs, she kept the dictionary by her side. Danielle hadn't wanted to disturb her. But it didn't

matter that Danielle didn't do her homework. She was a naturally great speller. She sailed through the spelling quiz.

When it was time to go home, Mrs. Cronin handed out the field trip permission slips for everyone to get signed by their parents, and she gave Danielle an extra folded piece of paper. "Give this to your parents, Danielle. I told you it was coming."

Danielle kept her face as calm as she could. She nodded.

"One of them has to sign it."

Danielle nodded again.

Danielle ran home. Rosie greeted her at the back door as usual. And today there was nothing strange going on. Ma and Roger sat at the piano, and Ma was trying to get Roger to understand what an octave was.

Danielle poured herself a glass of milk and peeled a banana. The note from Mrs. Cronin sat hidden in her backpack. What was the point of that note, anyway? Danielle would do

vent in ear
• lava la
• ash la
• ma

all the rest of her homework assignments right away. On time. Just like she used to. Her parents didn't really need to read any note.

Today the only homework was to get her field trip permission slip signed. Danielle would do that, no problem.

"Don't come down," called Clarissa from the basement.

Danielle went downstairs.

"I told you not to come down." Clarissa sat on the floor and glued pieces of paper to the outside of the olive oil jar.

"What are you doing?"

"Making a surprise for Ma. You know how she says there's beauty in everything. I'm going to show her the beauty in the olive oil jar. Don't tell."

"I won't." Danielle went upstairs and out the door with Rosie. They chased each other around the backyard for an hour or so. Rosie barked the whole time, and Danielle laughed. This was good track training, too.

When Pa drove up the driveway, Danielle ran to get the two pieces of paper—the permission slip and the note from Mrs. Cronin. She smoothed them both flat and laid them on the kitchen table, with the field trip permission slip on top.

Pa came in the back door.

"I need your signature. We're going on a field trip."

"Oh, yeah? Where?"

"The Franklin Mint."

"Sounds good. I remember going on a field trip there when I was a kid. I loved it." Pa took a pen out of his inside breast pocket. "Where do I sign?"

"Right at the bottom."

Pa signed.

Danielle quickly pulled the second sheet down just a little, so only the bottom showed. That was the note from Mrs. Cronin. The skin behind Danielle's ears went tight with anxiety. "You have to sign the second page, too."

Pa signed.

"Thanks." Danielle folded the two pieces of paper. "And I need a check for fifteen dollars for the Student Activities Fund."

"What's that cover?"

"I don't know. Want to read the permission slip?"

"No. Fifteen dollars sounds reasonable. You're going to have a great time." Pa took out his checkbook and wrote the check. "Anything else?"

"That's it."

Angel Talk

"You let Danielle get away without her parents seeing the note from the teacher." The Archangel of Responsibility shook his head. "Why didn't you do something about it?"

"I was just finishing up this pot holder. See how nice it is?" The little angel dangled a bright purple square from her fingers.

"Danielle's mother already took a dozen purple photos."

"I know. I can't work that fast. But I'll stick this in her top drawer so she can find it. Then the next time she thinks about a purple photo, she'll use it."

"Little angel, this mother's photography exhibit isn't your problem. The problem is Danielle."

"Well, I know that." The Little Angel of Responsibility lifted her shoulders, then dropped them heavily. "I'll try to pay better attention from now on."

Science Project

What was in the note? Mrs. Cronin hadn't said Danielle couldn't read it. But somehow Danielle had the feeling she wasn't supposed to. Still, Mrs. Cronin should have told Danielle not to if she didn't want her to. And what if the note said something important—something Danielle should know?

Danielle pressed her back against the side of the bus so no one could look over her shoulder. She opened the note and held it close to her face.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. LeFevre,

Danielle hasn't handed in her homework for the past three weeks. She did such a fine job on her first marking period, I'd hate to see her grades go

down. Would you like to have a conference to discuss this? I can meet with you after school any day next week.

I've told Danielle to ask you to sign this note, so that I can be sure you've read it.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Mrs. Cronin

Uh-oh. Mrs. Cronin had asked whether Ma and Pa wanted to have a conference. Danielle took out her pencil. She wrote, "no" above Pa's signature as neatly as she could, what with the bus turning corners and everything. It didn't look that bad. And Mrs. Cronin wore glasses—maybe she couldn't see that well. She folded it up.

When Danielle got to her desk, she unfolded just the bottom flap of the note. She

showed it to Judy. "Does that look bad?"

"Does what look bad?"

"The 'no' above my pa's name."

"It looks okay."

Danielle folded the note again.

"Why'd you write 'no' above your father's name?" asked Judy.

"How'd you know I wrote it?"

"I recognize your handwriting. Besides, it's in pencil, and your father's name is in pen."

"Can I borrow your eraser?" Danielle erased the 'no,' but it smudged all yucky because Judy's eraser was wet from being in her mouth. Oh, well. The starting bell still hadn't rung, so Danielle went up to the front of the class and handed Mrs. Cronin the note. She held her breath.

Mrs. Cronin didn't open the note. Instead, she smiled at Danielle and said, "Thank you."

Danielle wished Mrs. Cronin wasn't so nice about it.

Again, the day went pretty well. Up till

science time, that is. Mrs. Cronin assigned a long-term project. It was due next Thursday—in exactly a week. Everyone had to buy a piece of poster board and draw a volcano, showing the inside and labeling every part. Then they had to write a one-page report on a volcano that had been active this century. Any volcano, anywhere in the world. Because there weren't enough books on volcanoes in the school library for everyone in the class, they had to go to the public library or look up information on the Internet to do their research.

Well, that wasn't so bad. And Danielle already had a piece of poster board left over from a project last year.

Danielle took the bus home with Clarissa so that she'd get there quicker and have more time to go to the library to start her research. But when they walked through the back door, Danielle knew something had happened. Rosie didn't greet them.

Clarissa ran upstairs. Danielle followed.

Ma was lying on her bed asleep. Rosie was nestled beside her in the crook of her arm. A book lay open, facedown, by Ma's hand: *The Best Photographs of Dorothea Lange.*

Roger sat on the floor, making designs on his Lite-Brite.

"Why's Ma sleeping?" Clarissa whispered.

"She's tired," said Roger.

"How come?" asked Danielle.

"She found that in her drawer last night." Roger pointed at a purple square on the floor by the bed. "So she stayed up most of the night taking purple pictures again." Roger turned his Lite-Brite so they could see. "Look what I did."

"It's nice, Roger." Danielle took Roger by the hand. "Let's all go outside and play so we don't bother Ma."

Clarissa walked over to the bed and peered closely at the purple square. "I think it's a pot holder."

"Come on," whispered Danielle.

They all went outside to play with Rosie, till Pa came home. Then they cooked dinner together, and Pa read to them while Ma sat quietly with one arm around Danielle and the other around Clarissa. Roger perched on her lap. They went to bed early. Danielle didn't think about her science project at all until she was in bed.

Oh, well. It didn't matter that much. It was a long-term project, after all. She still had the next six days to work on it.

Angel Talk

"What are you doing, little angel?"

"I'm almost through. There, see?" The Little Angel of Responsibility pressed her creation flat between her palms.

"What is it?" asked the archangel.

"A bookmark. I made it out of yarn."

The Archangel of Responsibility held up the bookmark. "It's very nice. Is this for Danielle to use on the volcano books she checks out?"

"Oh, no. It's for her mother. I watched that mother for a little while this morning. She loves one of the pictures in her photography book. That's what she was looking at before she fell asleep. I'm going to stick this in the book so she can find it again fast when she needs to."

"That's good of you, little angel. But you're sidetracked again."

"I know." The little angel shrugged one shoulder slightly. "But Danielle's doing fine. She took her little sister and brother outside to play. That's about as responsible as a big sister can get."

"Yes," said the archangel. "Danielle knows exactly what to do for them."

The Little Angel of Responsibility smiled. "See?"

"Sometimes you can know what to do for other people but not what to do for yourself."

The little angel thought about that. "In a way, Danielle's on her own these days. Maybe she doesn't really know what to do for herself."

"I think you're right. She's floundering."

"And I'm supposed to step in to guide her." The little angel put her leftover yarn in her pocket. She looked up at the archangel earnestly. "I'll make sure she goes to the library tomorrow."

"Good start."

The Library

"Race you home?" asked Kirby.

Danielle threw her backpack over one shoulder. "That sounds good. Ouch!"

"What happened?"

"Something poked me." Danielle opened her backpack and checked. "It must have been the corner of my ruler." She rearranged things and took a look at the yellow sheet of paper with the directions for the science project. "I guess I really shouldn't run with you."

"Why not?"

"If I ride the bus home, I can get to the library faster and check out a volcano book."

"Oh, yeah, that. I checked one out yesterday. All right, then, I'll see you tomorrow morning at track practice, right?" Kirby ran off.

Danielle climbed on the bus. Clarissa was at the rear. When Danielle smiled at her, Clarissa came up and sat by her.

"Want half of my apple?" Clarissa held up a half-eaten apple. It was brown on the bitten side.

"No thanks."

"Look, Danielle, I'm hungry and it's not nice to eat in front of people if they're not eating, but the only other things I have left from lunch are my cookies, and I love them."

"That's okay, I'm not hungry, Clarissa. Eat your cookies."

Clarissa ripped open a four-pack of Oreo cookies and gobbled them.

Danielle remembered how nice it was when she was Clarissa's age and she brought a lunch box every day. Ma used to put in treats. But this year the girls in her grade were all buying. Danielle didn't know why they bought—the lunch at school wasn't great unless it was pizza, and pizza was only

once a week—but she didn't feel like being different. She looked out the window and tried not to smell the Oreo cookies.

When they got home, Ma was cooking soup. "Who wants to help me chop vegetables?"

"I do," said Clarissa.

"I'm going to the library," said Danielle.

"Fine. Don't forget your bike helmet."

Danielle put on her helmet and rode across town as fast as she could. She locked up her bike and went in. The library's card catalog had been computerized last year, so Danielle went right to the computer and typed in "volcano" under "subject heading." There were six titles. She copied down all the call numbers and went searching.

The first book wasn't there. Neither was the second. Nor the third. None of them were there. That had to be wrong. She went back to the computer and checked the call numbers. They were right. She walked over to the circulation desk. "Excuse me, ma'am."

"Can I help you?"

"I need to find a book on volcanoes."

"Who doesn't?"

"What?"

The librarian smiled. "More than a dozen children came in yesterday looking for books on volcanoes. They're all checked out."

"Oh." Danielle looked at the list of call numbers in her hand. What was she supposed to do now? She stood there.

"Could I see your list a minute?" The librarian reached for Danielle's sheet of paper. She typed at the keyboard of her computer. "Two of these books can be found at the Ridley Library. And the Springfield Library has one of them. Plus they have several more books on volcanoes. They're a much bigger library, you know."

Ridley was in one direction, and Springfield was in the opposite. But both of them were far enough away that Ma wouldn't like it if Danielle tried to ride her bike there.

And she didn't know where those libraries were, anyway.

"Oh, dear," said the librarian, typing quickly. "All of them are checked out—at both libraries. But, look here, there's a book at the Nether Providence Library. That's not too far away. Do you want me to request it for you by interlibrary loan?"

"How long does that take?"

"A few days. Certainly not more than a week."

"I need it fast."

"I could call and put a hold on it for you. Then you could get someone to drive you there tomorrow to pick it up."

"Okay. Thank you."

"What's your name?"

"Danielle LeFevre."

"I'll take care of it. But make sure you go tomorrow. Holds are automatically canceled after twenty-four hours."

Angel Talk

"Did you make the ruler poke Danielle?" asked the Archangel of Responsibility.

"No. I mean, I poked her, but not with the ruler."

"What did you use?"

"A knitting needle."

The archangel dropped his chin forward. "A knitting needle? That could hurt."

"I did it gently. I know just how. I poke the other little angels all the time."

"Why?"

"You know, it speeds them along when they're supposed to be working. I'm the Little Angel of Responsibility, after all."

The archangel scratched the very top of his head again. He looked so funny that the little

angel laughed. He smiled. "You didn't hurt Danielle, or she would have been upset. So I guess that's okay. Now the job is to make sure she gets to the Nether Providence Library tomorrow."

"I can poke her parents," said the little angel.

"That's a bad idea." The archangel frowned. "Grown-ups don't take well to invisible pokes."

"Well, then, I'll stick to poking Danielle."

Away

Saturday morning track training was fun. First, everyone dropped for push-ups. Danielle wasn't great at push-ups, but she did one more than last week, so that was a positive sign. Then they did jumping jacks. Danielle could jump forever. Then they spread their feet and touched their toes with the opposite hand. Danielle was good at that, too. Finally, they ran. And ran. And ran.

When it was over, Danielle ran home. It wasn't even lunchtime yet. Ma could easily take her to the Nether Providence Library. Or Pa could. She went inside and rubbed Rosie behind the ears as the dog licked her. Then she walked through the kitchen into the living room.

"Danielle, hi." Ma stood beside a small

suitcase and a pile of photographic equipment.

"What's going on?"

"I got invited to cover a family reunion at the Darlington estate outside Harrisburg." Ma beamed. "They called me last night. There will be a regular photographer there, too, taking all the usual kinds of photos. But they added me at the last minute to take whatever shots I want."

Harrisburg? Harrisburg was the capital of the state. And it wasn't close. Danielle tapped her sneaker tip against a leg of the tripod. "Today?"

"Actually, it's tomorrow, but I'm leaving in just a little while because I have to walk all around the estate and get a feel for the place." Ma opened a paper bag and studied the contents as she talked. "Then I'll know where to position myself for viewing the different areas where the people will be. They've set aside a room for me in their guest

house." She looked up at Danielle. "It's so exciting."

"When are you coming back?"

"Late Sunday night or maybe not till Monday. It all depends."

Danielle's mouth went dry. Ma had never been away overnight before. "Who's going to take care of us?"

Ma laughed. "You're all pretty big now. You can take care of each other. And Pa will be here."

Danielle listened hard. The house felt empty. "Where are they? Where's Clarissa and Roger and Pa?"

"Clarissa's at Shelby's house, and Roger's with Pa. They're buying me film for the Canon." Ma glanced around, as though checking to make sure everything was there. "And batteries for my new strobe." She picked up the strobe light and packed it carefully into its case. She took the power pack she had to wear around her waist for it and

tucked that in beside the strobe. "Then I'll be all set."

Danielle dropped onto the couch. Ma was famous. And now she was leaving them.

But she'd be back. And Pa could handle things. With Danielle's help.

Ma made little clicking noises with her tongue against the roof of her mouth. She sounded like a sputtering motor. "Is there anything you need before I leave?"

Danielle thought about the volcano book waiting for her at the Nether Providence Library. It seemed like a million miles away. How could she bother Ma with that now? She shook her head.

"Are you sure? Daddy told me about some field trip. Do you need to take a bag lunch on Monday?"

"No. That's not for a long time."

"Oh. Do you have a track meet tomorrow? Because I can do a quick laundry if you need your track shirt."

"No track meets yet, Ma. Anyway, I know how to do the wash."

Ma smiled. "You're so grown up, Danielle. You hardly need me at all."

Angel Talk

The Archangel of Responsibility cocked his head and ran his tongue across his top teeth under his lip. He didn't look happy. "Are you waiting for something, little angel?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't understand why you didn't poke Danielle to make her speak up. She needs to get the library book or she can't do her science project."

"Her mother has too much on her mind," said the little angel. "Her father can take her to the library."

"If she tells her father. But what if she doesn't?"

"I'll make her," said the Little Angel of Responsibility.

"Hmmm."

All Week

Danielle helped Pa do the laundry. Then she played with Roger while Pa worked on a memo for his job. Then the three of them cooked dinner together and watched a video and went to bed. Clarissa spent the night at Shelby's.

On Sunday Danielle read a book to Roger while Pa read the newspaper. Then Clarissa came home, and everyone went ice-skating at the indoor rink over in Aston. Then Danielle helped make lunch and clean up afterward. Then they raked leaves and shopped for dinner and cooked and read and told stories and went to bed.

When Danielle woke up on Monday, Ma was home. She made everyone breakfast and talked and talked about the weekend.

Danielle had math homework on Monday, but somehow she never managed to do it. The test on Tuesday went badly. Mrs. Cronin told her that if she didn't start making up all the overdue work, she was going to fail math. Danielle tried her best not to think about it.

On Wednesday she had her weekly spelling test. That wasn't so bad in spite of the fact that she hadn't done her homework, because she was such a good speller. But Mrs. Cronin told her that tests were only half her grade for spelling—homework was the other half. Danielle tried her best not to think about that, either.

Danielle didn't run to school on Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday. And she didn't run home. She felt too tired to run. So she took the bus. Maybe she wouldn't do track this season, after all. She didn't seem to have the energy.

When she got home each day, Ma was busy in her darkroom or on the phone talking

about some new event she'd been hired to photograph. So Danielle watched TV or played with Roger or took Rosie for a walk. Sometimes she felt okay, but mostly she felt lonely. The knot of worry in her stomach never loosened.

And late at night, after her shower, Danielle looked at herself in the mirror and wondered about all the little bruises on her arms. Something had been poking her for the last few days. She felt pokes when she first came home from school, and after dinner, and every time she sat down just to rest. It worried her. Maybe she had a disease. Maybe she would be one big bruise before long.

And Ma would never even notice.

Angel Talk

"Your pokes aren't working."

"I know," said the little angel. "You said this would be an easy task, but it isn't easy at all."

"It might have been easy if you'd kept focused on Danielle right from the start and not gone off making her mother a pot holder and a bookmark."

"Oh, yeah." The Little Angel of Responsibility took out her knitting needles and looked at them sorrowfully. "Well, I'm really working hard now, but I can't figure Danielle out. When I poke her, instead of doing her work, she just rubs the spot I poked." She clicked her knitting needles together in worry. "Oh, dear. She's so far behind now, she can never catch up."

"I bet that's exactly what she thinks."

"What can I do? Danielle's given up. I could poke her a hundred times a day and it wouldn't do any good."

The Archangel of Responsibility shook his head. "A hundred times is a bit too much, don't you think?"

"Then I'm going to try something else," said the little angel.

"What?"

"I'm not going to tell you, because I don't think you'll approve. But I have to try it."

The archangel put his hands in his pockets. "Be careful, little angel."

Thursday

Thursday started awful. Science projects were due, and Mrs. Cronin looked at Danielle when she didn't turn hers in. She just looked and looked and didn't say a word. In fact, all day long every time Danielle glanced Mrs. Cronin's way, she was looking at her.

At the very end of the day, when Danielle was about to walk out of the classroom, Mrs. Cronin gave out a little yelp. "Danielle," she said.

Danielle stopped by her desk.

Mrs. Cronin rubbed her arm. Then she shook her head. "Nothing." She went back to her seat and started to sit down, when she jumped back to her feet. "Ouch!"

Danielle stared at her.

Mrs. Cronin rubbed her backside.

"Danielle, can you hand in your science project tomorrow?"

"No, Mrs. Cronin."

"Why not?"

"I haven't done it."

Mrs. Cronin looked sad. "Did you begin it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Danielle looked at the clock. "If I don't hurry, I'll miss my bus home."

Mrs. Cronin nodded. "Okay. Go on home."

Danielle hurried to the bus.

"Here, Danielle," called Clarissa, waving wildly from the second row. "I saved you a seat." She had saved Danielle a seat all week. Clarissa was delighted that Danielle had taken to riding the bus with her. She looked around at all her friends now and smiled proudly.

When they got home, Clarissa and Danielle went around to the back door together.

Ma was standing there waiting. "Hi, kids."

Clarissa kissed Ma. "I had a great day."

"I'm glad, Clarissa. You can tell me all about it when you're taking your bath tonight. Right now I need to talk with Danielle. Would you do me a favor and keep an eye on Roger? He's playing in the den."

Clarissa looked at Danielle curiously. "Sure." She kissed Ma again and ran into the house.

Danielle put on a smile, but she didn't feel happy at all. "What's up, Ma?"

"That's what I wanted to ask you." Ma led the way into the kitchen. "Have a seat." She poured Danielle a glass of milk and put a bowl of apple slices in front of her. "Mrs. Cronin called me."

Danielle shoved a slice of apple in her mouth. Her stomach felt like cold lead.

"She told me you haven't handed in any homework for a long time. And you didn't do a science project."

"Volcanoes," muttered Danielle as she chewed.

"Right. Volcanoes." Ma sat down opposite Danielle. "What's going on?"

"I don't know."

Ma took a deep breath. "Do you have homework tonight?"

Danielle nodded.

"Can I see it?"

"It's just reading."

Ma held out her hand. "Can I see?"

Danielle opened her backpack and handed Ma the reading book. "Chapter Six."

"All of it?"

"Yeah. I mean, actually, tonight we're supposed to read the last part. But I haven't read any of it yet."

Ma blinked. "How about we sit on the couch side by side? You can read your chapter, and I can read something I'm supposed to read, too."

"About photography?"

Ma bit her bottom lip. "Yes."

"Okay."

They went into the living room and read. Chapter Six told the story of the Lewis and Clark expedition. It wasn't boring at all. Every now and then Danielle looked over at Ma. Ma smiled at her and went back to her reading. Danielle read the whole chapter.

"Are you done?"

"With the reading."

"So now you're supposed to do something else?" asked Ma.

"There are questions at the end of the chapter."

"Let's go into the kitchen and you can sit at the table and write your answers while I make dinner."

They went into the kitchen, and Danielle wrote the answers to all ten questions. She folded her sheet of paper and put it in the book and shut the book and put it in her backpack. She felt great. Something was

done. Something was finally done, from start to finish. She came over and stood by Ma. "Can I help you?"

"Stir the pasta, okay?"

Danielle picked out the perfect stirring spoon and set to work.

"What else have you got to do tonight?"

"That's all."

"Really?"

"I swear."

Ma ripped lettuce into the salad bowl. "It seems all this started just around the time my photo appeared in the *Inquirer.* Is that so, Danielle?"

"I guess."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

Ma sliced tomatoes. Her hair swung forward, so Danielle couldn't see her face, but Danielle saw a tear splash onto a tomato slice. "I used to sit by you when you did your homework. Then I stopped. I'm sorry, Danielle."

"Don't be sorry. It's not your fault." Danielle stopped stirring and hugged Ma. "I got behind. And then I didn't know what to do. It's like I thought I could never catch up, so why try?"

Ma put down her knife and squeezed Danielle to her. "It must have felt terrible." She rested her cheek on the top of Danielle's head. "I'm so sorry I abandoned you. I had other things on my mind and I just forgot you needed me. You seemed happy and you didn't complain and you've always been such an easy kid, so happy and ready."

"I'm sorry I quit, Ma."

Ma sniffed and wiped at her nose. "We'll both do better now. What else are you behind in?"

"Everything."

"So where you do want to start?"

"Well, math might be a good place."

"After dinner you can begin."

Danielle shook her head. "I didn't bring home my book."

"All right. Then bring it home tomorrow and we can sit side by side as you do all the assignments you've missed. And you should do all the new assignments Mrs. Cronin gives over the weekend, too."

"Okay," said Danielle. She felt like she was floating. She would finally catch up. Ma would help her. "Okay."

Angel Talk

The Archangel of Responsibility tugged at the loose end of yarn on the ball in the little angel's hands. "You gave that teacher a poke with your knitting needles, didn't you?"

"No."

"No?"

"No. I gave her five pokes."

"Five? What for?"

"You saw the first two, as Danielle was about to go home. Number three got her to take a closer look at the note Danielle's father had signed and realize that something had been erased from it."

"But what was erased was only the word 'no' that Danielle had written."

"Mrs. Cronin didn't know that. The erasing

made the whole note look suspicious. So I gave her a fourth poke to get her to telephone Danielle's home."

"Once she spoke to Danielle's mother, that must have been enough."

"No," said the little angel. "Mrs. Cronin wanted Danielle's mother to come in for a conference tomorrow. So I had to poke her a fifth time so that she'd explain everything over the phone and Danielle could get help right away."

"Not bad," said the archangel. "I have to admit I'm surprised pokes worked on a grown-up, and I'm not delighted that you did it when I had told you not to. But, in fact, you made things a lot better."

"Well, that's that," said the Little Angel of Responsibility. "The mother is back at her job as mother, and Danielle is on the road to good work habits again." She measured out a long strand of yarn. "I think I'll weave her a bookmark, too. Like the one I did for her mother.

She'll be needing it with all the reading she has to catch up on."

"Wait a minute. There's a big difference between things being a lot better and the job being finished," said the archangel. "It's good that Danielle is doing her work with her mother sitting beside her. But you know that's not enough."

"It worked for Danielle before all this started."

"Well, sure. But it can't go on forever, anyway. Think about it. Clarissa has a little homework these days and she's going to have more every year. And someday even Roger will have homework. The mother can't sit beside all of them as they do every bit of their work."

"Maybe the father can help out."

The archangel laughed. "Sure he can. He does laundry and cooks and all the other household chores, just like the mother. But that's not the point. Come on, little angel. Take a larger view of it. We get tasks all the time—

at school, on the track field, with our friends. Our parents can't be beside us every step of the way."

"And this mother needs to do her photography, anyway," said the little angel slowly.

"Yes. But it's not the mother I'm concerned with. For Danielle's own sake, she needs to learn how to face a task and complete it—on her own. Without that, she'll never be reliable or responsible."

"And she'll never be proud of herself." The little angel shook her finger emphatically. "She hated being behind in her work. It worried her so much, she was giving up on everything. Even track."

"Exactly."

The Little Angel of Responsibility took out her knitting needles and clacked them together loudly. "Off to work!"

Math, Volcanoes, the World

Danielle followed Clarissa in through the back door. Rosie greeted them and led the way into the kitchen.

Roger sat at the table finger painting. "Hi. Want to paint with me?"

"Sure," said Clarissa. She dropped her backpack and rolled up her sleeves.

Danielle looking longingly at the paints. She was great at finger painting. One of her best paintings hung over her bed. Something poked her in the shoulder. "I can't," said Danielle. "I have to do my math homework."

Ma came into the kitchen right then. "How many math assignments do you have?"

"Five." Danielle winced. Even to her ear it sounded like a lot.

"And do you have other homework this weekend?"

"No new homework. But at some point I have to do the last four spelling homeworks." Danielle screwed up her mouth. "And my volcano project. The one that was due yesterday."

Ma raised her eyebrows. "Wow. So what's first?"

Danielle got tired at the whole idea. But suddenly she felt a bunch of pokes in her backside. "Well, getting a book on volcanoes is probably the hardest. Everyone checked them out of the library. I have to go to Nether Providence. If the book's still there, that is."

"You said the projects were due yesterday," said Clarissa. "So maybe everyone else has turned in their books already."

Danielle brightened. "Maybe. I'll go to our library first, then."

"Good idea," said Ma.

Danielle rode her bike to the library. Judy

was leaving just as she arrived. "Did you turn in your volcano book?" asked Danielle.

"Yup."

Danielle ran to the circulation desk. There was a volcano book, not even shelved yet. "I need that book," she said to the librarian.

"Oh, hi. I remember you." The librarian smiled and checked the book out to Danielle.

Danielle rode her bike home. She put the book in her room, then ran into the kitchen and took out her math book. She worked on math problems while Clarissa and Roger painted and Ma cooked.

Most of the problems were easy, but one confused Danielle. She stared at it a while, then she closed the math book and drummed her fingertips nervously on the cover.

Something poked her hand. It hurt.

Danielle stopped drumming and opened the book again. She made another go at that math problem. Oh, yeah. Now she under-

stood. She worked out the answer in neat columns of figures.

"Time to clean up." Ma screwed the lids on the finger paints. "How far did you get, Danielle?"

"I did three whole assignments."

Ma smiled. "I'll check them after dinner. For now, help me set the table."

Pa came home, and they all ate together. Then Danielle worked on her last two math assignments while Ma checked her first three.

"Nice work," said Ma.

"Looks like you have a lot more homework than usual," said Pa.

Danielle looked at Ma. Ma looked back at her with questioning eyes. Danielle could let Ma tell Pa—but it was Danielle's mess, so, really, it was up to Danielle to tell Pa. She took a deep breath. "I've got some catching up to do. That's why it's so much."

"Catching up?"

"Yeah. But I'm doing it. I got up-to-date on my reading last night. And these are my last two math assignments. And tomorrow I have to make a poster on volcanoes and write a report. And then I have some spelling homework. I'll do it all, Pa."

"Of course you will." Pa looked over Danielle's shoulder. "I'm no good at spelling, but I can check these math problems when you're through, if you want. And I've always been fascinated by volcanoes."

Danielle finished the math and waited while Pa checked her work. It was right—every question.

She hummed to herself as she put her things away and as she climbed the stairs and as she showered. It felt good to have her parents beside her when she worked—it felt good not to be alone anymore.

And she had forgotten how much fun math could be. And how terrific it felt to struggle with a hard problem and finally get it right. In

fact, she didn't really need to ask Ma and Pa to check all the problems. In the future she could ask them to check just her hard problems.

Danielle sat on her bed and opened the volcano book and read. When she looked at the clock, it was already nine-thirty. Danielle was exhausted. And she'd done more schoolwork today than she'd ever done before.

She picked up her clock. It was an alarm clock, and Danielle had never used the alarm before. But she knew how to set it. Track practice started at ten in the morning. If she got up at nine, she could eat a fast breakfast and read about volcanoes for almost an hour. That would give her enough information to do her report.

She set the alarm for nine, turned off the lamp, and lay down.

Then she sat up, turned on the lamp, and reset the alarm for eight. The bell on top made a tiny ring as she changed the alarm time. An extra hour would give her enough

time to draw the poster, too. And if she had time left over, she would read extra and make her report that much better. She would surprise Pa when she came home from track and sat down to do the report with all the information already in her head.

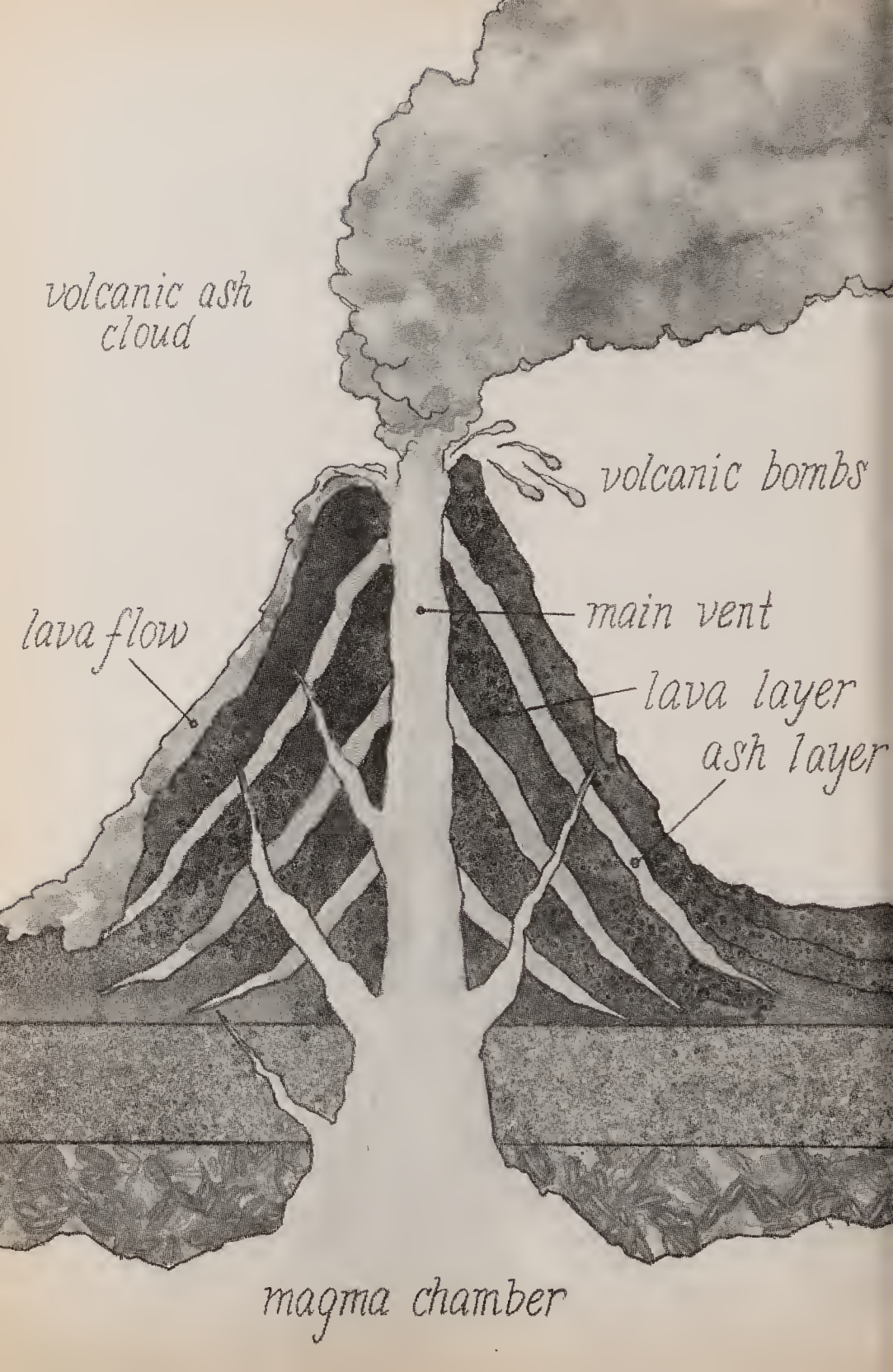
Danielle went to her desk and got out the old piece of poster board from last year. One of the corners was bent, but otherwise it looked good as new. She smoothed the corner flat and lined her Magic Markers up along the edge of the poster board. Everything was ready.

Danielle smiled, turned off the lamp, and fell asleep.

Angel Thoughts

The newest Archangel of Responsibility spread her wings and took to the air. The tiny ring of the alarm as Danielle reset it announced her earning her feathers. She wanted to stick around and see Danielle's science project when it was finished. But more than that, she wanted to finish her own task without any more distractions of any sort. After all, the Little Angel of Imagination had waited a long time for his prize for winning the chess match.

A light drizzle made the archangel give a little shiver. Then she laughed. Handing the Little Angel of Imagination a rainbow scarf just as the sun came out again would be perfect. She flew as fast as she could.


volcanic ash cloud
volcanic bombs
main vent
lava flow
lava layer
ash layer
magma chamber

Danielle's Volcano

We have a winner!

It doesn't always take a Little Angel to do good deeds, as we learned from the hundreds of wonderful essays we received in the past several months. But Shelby O'Brien, the winner of our Aladdin Angelwings "Earn Your Wings!" essay contest, is certainly the closest thing to a real Little Angel there is.

Here is Shelby's story:

I've had long hair as long as I can remember. Every night my mom would wash my hair and comb it out. Then my mom found out she had rheumatoid arthritis. It is attacking her wrists. This makes it difficult for her to do a lot of things. Things that most people take for granted. Her hands get very sore at night. So it was getting hard for her to comb my hair. I offered to get my hair cut so I could comb it myself. My mom said no. She said she didn't want me to get my hair cut because of her hands. So I stopped asking to get my hair cut because it upset her.

When I was raising money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation®, I learned about Locks of Love. People donate their hair, and Locks of Love makes it into wigs. Then they give the wigs to children with medical hair loss. I thought, "what a great idea!" I could get my hair cut and help to make a wig for a needy child. My mom

wouldn't have to comb my hair anymore. I knew my mom couldn't say no to such a great cause.

So, I had 18 inches cut off my hair. Then I sent it to Locks of Love. Now my mom doesn't have to comb my hair anymore. So she can rest her hands when they are sore.

To conclude: I was the second highest fund-raiser for my dance school's drive for the Make-A-Wish Foundation®. I donated my hair to help a child. This also helped my mom. I talked Uncle Nick and Gordy into donating their hair. My mom says I'm her "Little Angel." I love my new haircut, too!

Shelby is nine years old and lives with her family in York, Pennsylvania. Donna Jo Napoli was delighted to include Shelby's name in Aladdin Angelwings #10 *Running Away.*

We thank all the contestants for their remarkable essays. And a very special thank you to Shelby O'Brien for her extraordinary good deeds!

Read all of the
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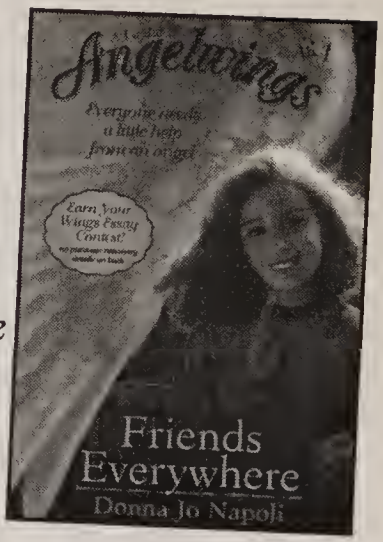

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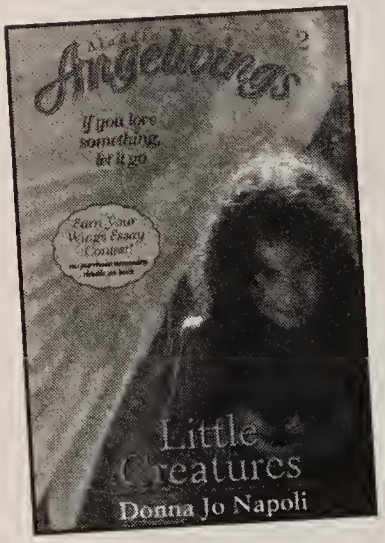

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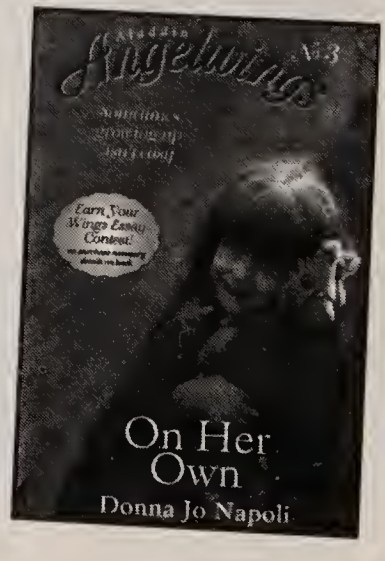

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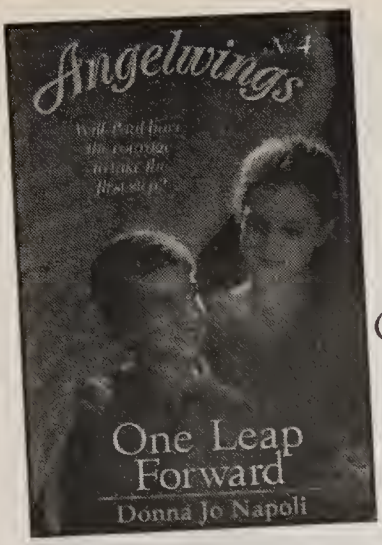

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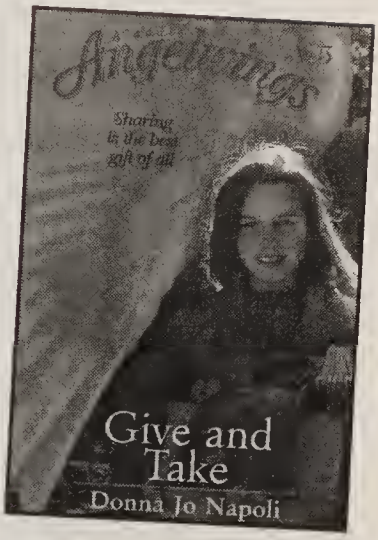

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And don't miss these other
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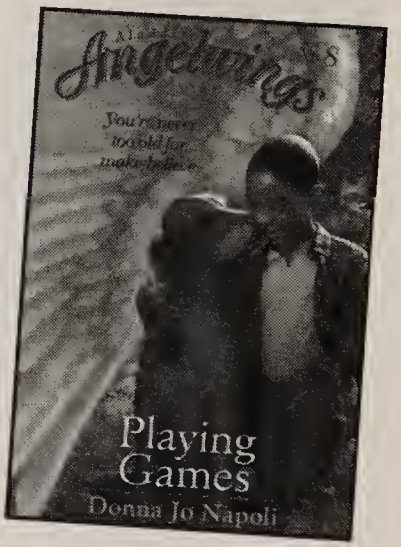

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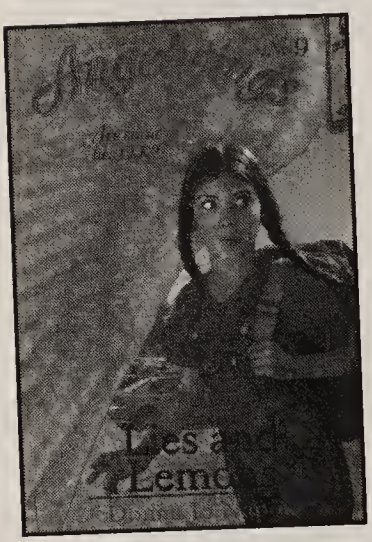

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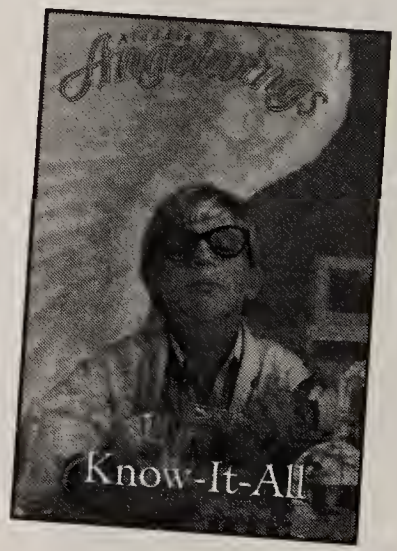

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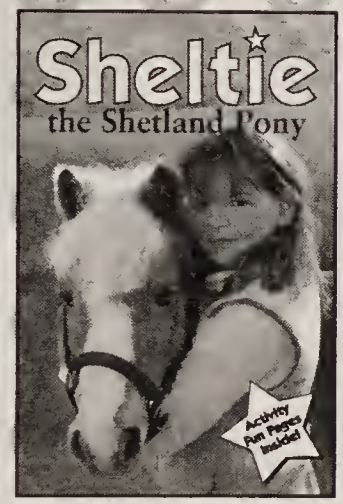

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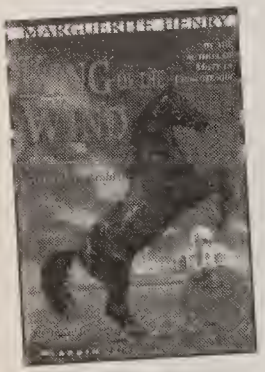

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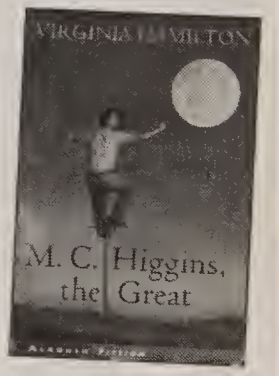

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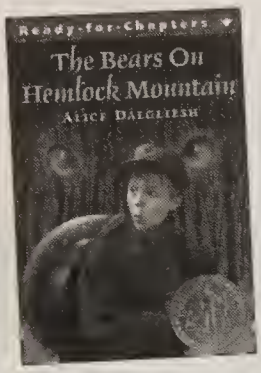

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